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Numbers are Just Not Enough: A Critical Analysis of Race, Gender, Sexuality, and Ability in
Elementary and Middle School Health Textbooks

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Abstract

Textbooks are a multimillion dollar publishing business in the United States. Even as twenty-first century classrooms become more multimodal, digital and hardcopy textbooks remain a key feature of American education. Consequently, classroom textbooks have been shown to control knowledge dissemination across the content areas. In particular, health texts have been uniquely shown to communicate values that validate or marginalize students and encourage healthy or harmful activity. Thus, what textbook makers choose to include as worthy of study, and how they portray various groups of people with regard to race, gender, sexuality, and ability has societal implications. Employing quantitative and qualitative content analysis methods, the authors of this study analyzed 1,468 images across elementary and middle school health textbooks to examine the portrayal of race, gender, and sexuality. They found that, while gender and racial diversity are well-represented in texts, women and people of color were frequently portrayed in stereotypical roles. For example, girls were depicted daydreaming about heterosexual marriage. Furthermore, this analysis revealed limited representations of sexuality. Findings suggest that focusing on the numerical representation of marginalized groups is not enough to address issues of equity and power in classroom curricula. Instead, the authors argue, educators must consider the ways in which people are positioned in curricular materials, and ask if portrayals perpetuate or challenge traditional stereotypes.

Keywords: textbooks, diversity, curriculum, critical-multiculturalism, health education

Introduction

Critical education theorists and practitioners have long argued that representations of various issues, events, and groups of people in school textbooks can influence students' views of themselves and the world (e.g., Hickman & Porfilio, 2012; McLaren, 2015; Tintocalis, 2011;

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Yoso, 2002) and that group depictions in instructional materials lead to views on what is “normal” (Loewen, 2007; Osborn, 2016). Sleeter and Grant (1991) have written, “Debates about curriculum content can be understood broadly as struggles for power to define the symbolic representation of the world and society, that will be transmitted to the young, for the purpose of either gaining or holding onto power” (p. 79). Therefore, if texts used in classrooms represent marginalized populations in a negative or demeaning way, the result may be a narrow view of these groups in society (see Toppin, 1980).

In the case of critical health education studies, scholars have problematized public health campaigns, discourses, and curriculum broadly as promoting neoliberal and fascist ideologies aimed at controlling the citizenry through messages of shame, individual responsibility, and risk avoidance (see Fitzpatrick & Tinning, 2014; Leahy, 2014). Additionally, health texts have been found to communicate values that validate or marginalize students and encourage healthy or harmful activity (Lamb, 2010). Further, research in this field has demonstrated that while some young people resist or reinterpret the seemingly ubiquitous “health messages” they encounter in schools, others internalize these messages nearly wholesale (Burrows & McCormack, 2014). Thus, this paper explores how groups and individuals of various race, gender, and sexuality backgrounds are portrayed in elementary and middle school health textbooks as a means of understanding the apparent messages available to young people, grounded in the view that what textbook makers choose to include as worthy of study and how they portray various groups of people may have consequences for young people and society (see Osborn, 2016).

While scholars have critically explored representations of marginalized groups in social studies and history (e.g., Calderon, D., 2014; Field, Bauml, Wilhelm, & Jenkins, 2012; Gordy, Hogan, & Pritchard, 2004; Kuzmic, 2000; Loewen, 2007), English as a second language,

science, and literature textbooks (e.g., Hickman & Porfilio, 2012; Provenzo, Shaver, & Bello, 2011), few studies have examined representations in health textbooks (see Whatley, 1991 for one exception with college-level health textbooks). Yet, a comprehensive investigation of the portrayal of race, gender, and sexuality in elementary and middle school health textbooks specifically is important for multiple reasons in addition to those noted above. First, health disparities related to gender, race, and ethnicity have been well-documented and are of growing concern (see American Psychological Association, 2016; WHO, 2008), and historically few teachers have received preparation on how to teach health topics in schools, thus relying on the text (Wiley, 1993). Furthermore, elementary and middle school texts, in particular, are often students' first encounters with the formal curriculum, arguably a formative schooling experience and an ideal place to begin conversations about how students construct understandings of themselves in regards to race, sexuality, and gender in connection to healthy practices, with research showing the importance of this age (i.e. elementary and middle school) in students' construction of identity (see Lee & Anderson, 2009). Moreover, even as multimodal teaching becomes more prevalent, and technology increasingly breathes change into classroom life, textbooks persist in their ubiquity (Calderon, 2014; Polikoff, 2015) and remain big business in the United States (Carmody, 2012) with textbook companies not only controlling knowledge dissemination in U.S. K-12 schooling, but also controlling the means of assessment (Collins, 2012). Finally, though this paper focuses solely on health texts, the comprehensive survey of representation in textbooks presented here is the first of its kind in roughly 25 years, since the 1990s (see Sleeter & Grant, 1991; Sleeter and Grant's study was the last comprehensive analysis of elementary and middle school textbooks and did not include health texts) and consequently

will provide valuable data for equity-minded educators and scholars in the field of educational studies who wish to make claims about who textbooks include and how.

In order to evaluate each text's approach to representing and including various groups, we bring the following overarching research question to this project: How do elementary and middle school health textbooks depict race, gender, and sexual orientation? We specifically consider the frequency with which people of various backgrounds are presented in images and written content as well as their positioning. In doing so, we are able to demonstrate an increase in numbers of representations (since the 1991 study)—an apparent embracing of diversity and multiculturalism—paradoxically accompanied by implicit normative, controlling health messages that may perpetuate societal stereotypes and unequal social roles. We conclude that textbooks' increasing numbers of diverse representations is simply not enough to signify real social change in terms of race, gender, and sexual orientation inclusion.

Making Sense of “Representation”

In considering what “representation” means, our study draws from critical multiculturalist and feminist perspectives, which remind us that in addition to numerical representation, attention must be paid to power dynamics (see May & Sleeter, 2010). For example, textbook studies have used quantitative content analysis to demonstrate inequality as Sleeter and Grant (1991) did when calculating percentages of people by race, class, gender, and ability depicted in elementary and middle school textbooks published in the 1980s, across content areas (see also Burstyn & Corrigan, 2011). The researchers disaggregated their data by content area, but in general the texts they explored were found to overwhelmingly feature White people. In fact, an average of 80 percent of total people depicted in their sampled textbooks were

White. In addition, the people portrayed in the texts were also largely male and typically-abled, perpetuating the normativity of socially dominant groups.

Indeed, the mere act of including images of people representing non-dominant backgrounds in U.S. K-12 textbooks has a fraught history. Zimmerman (2011) quotes a textbook industry representative in 1965 saying, “When a publisher goes before an adoption committee in a southern state...the first question he is asked is, ‘Are there any pictures of Negroes in these textbooks of yours?’” (p. 228). This led publishers at the time to create distinct versions of texts that would be adopted in different regions. Consequently, the analysis presented here is concerned with questions of numbers, in terms of how many people of various backgrounds are visually represented in textbooks. However, we are also concerned with the *ways in which* different groups of people are represented through language and visual images. Hence, the contribution of this paper is in providing quantitative *and* qualitative analysis of current health textbooks.

We take a Foucauldian stance that focuses on issues of power and meaning that imbue representation in written language and visual images (Hall, 2001). Critical scholars (e.g. Fairclough, 1989; Hall, 2001; Holloway 1984) have argued that language and images in social and cultural contexts give people access to a particular range of choices around who they can be, known among critical discourse analysts as “positioning” (e.g. Davis & Harré, 1990). To consider issues of representation, power, and positioning in the case of textbooks specifically, prior analyses have shown that different words and types of language may be associated with people of different racial backgrounds, as well as with men or women (Kuzmic, 2000; Loewen, 2007; Martin, 1991; Moreau, 2003). Words such as “progress,” “improved,” and “successful” might be more commonly used in describing European Americans in social studies textbooks,

while words such as “problems,” “unrest,” and “hostile,” might be more commonly associated with African Americans (Grant & Sleeter, 2007, p. 132), with each set of words differently “positioning” the groups in question—with European Americans being presented positively in this example and African Americans negatively.

Similarly, textbooks may omit visual images of particular groups—as described above in the case of “Negroes” in southern texts in the 1960s—or might include images that are rife with social messages. Martin (1991), for instance, describes how scientific textbooks depict human female eggs as “depend[ing] on the sperm for rescue” (p. 490). That is, textbook images of male sperm are shown in motion and on an active quest for the female egg that waits passively, perpetuating stereotypical male-female notions of romance. Therefore, understanding *how* textbook publishers write about and visually depict individuals of different backgrounds is a key component in understanding the extent to which numerical representation in the number of images of people from marginalized groups in texts is a move towards social justice or potentially functioning to support the status quo.

McIntosh (1983) offers a framework that clarifies this movement beyond focusing on numeric representation to considering how representation works in curriculum. McIntosh outlines five phases of curriculum “re-visioning” that range from token inclusion, which is more about numeric representation, to authentic inclusion, using women and history as an example: 1) Womanless History—women are absent from the formal curriculum; 2) Women in History—the focus is on prominent women who may have had access to resources, etc., that other women did not; 3) Women as Problem, Anomaly, or Absence in History—moves beyond a focus on just prominent women, to consider those who may not have had access; 4) Women *as* History—women are presented as taking new approaches or making different assumptions; 5) History

Redefined or Reconstructed to Include Us All—requires a paradigm shift that considers “patterns of life in terms of systems of race, culture, caste, class, gender, religion, national origin, geographical location and other influences on life which we haven’t begun to name” (p. 22). Similarly, other scholars (e.g., Banks, 1995; Gorski, 1995-2014) identify stages of “multicultural curriculum transformation” that emphasize resisting facile notions of inclusion and representation, such as the “just add women [X group] and stir” view (Harding, 1995), which suggests that simply increasing the numbers of women represented is equivalent to meaningful curricular inclusion. Hence, if images and written language communicate power and meaning (Hall, 2001), even though non-dominant groups are represented in textbooks their inclusion may still constitute a move *away* from equity depending on how those groups are positioned in the text.

Methods

Data Sources

An initial exploration revealed that three conglomerate companies dominate the U.S., K-12 textbook market: Pearson, McGraw-Hill (now MacMillan/McGraw-Hill), and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (Carmody, 2012). Of these companies, only McGraw-Hill and Harcourt appeared to publish elementary and middle school health textbooks. Following precedent from other textbook analyses (e.g., Polikoff, 2015; Sleeter & Grant, 1991), we selected a representative sample of texts from a range of elementary and middle school grades from each publisher (see Table 1), which publishers provided to us based on our location in New York

State.² Note that though these texts are, in some cases, a decade old, they are the most recent editions available from publishers.

Table 1. Textbooks

Publisher/Series	Authors, Year, and Grade	Abbreviation
Harcourt Health and Fitness	Harcourt School Publishers, 2006, Grade 2	HAR2
	Harcourt School Publishers, 2007, Grade 4	HAR4
	Harcourt School Publishers, 2006, Grade 6	HAR6
McGraw-Hill Health & Wellness	Meeks & Heit, n. d., Grade 1	MAC1
	Meeks & Heit, 2008, Grade 3	MAC3
	Meeks & Heit, 2005, Grade 8	MAC8

The data from across the textbooks include 1,468 unique images depicting 3,008 individuals, as well as associated written portions of the texts that discuss race, gender, and/or sexuality.

Content Analysis Procedures

Types of content analyses. Building on prior research (Grant & Sleeter, 2007; Sleeter & Grant, 1991) we conducted image, “people to study,” and language analyses for each text (see Table 2). For the image analysis, we identified each image that appeared in the given textbooks and coded the apparent race, gender, and sexuality of each person. When an image featured more than one individual we noted the presence or absence of diversity within the group and recorded

² Publishers did not share specific information with us on the adoption of these textbooks across districts. As Loewen (2007) has documented, publishing companies are unlikely to be forthcoming with such information.

how individuals were positioned in relationship to one another. The “people to study” analysis focused on specific individuals who were noted as being important for making contributions to society (see Grant & Sleeter, 2007), who were usually showcased in a sidebar of the texts. For example, in HAR2 (see Table 1 for full titles of texts) German scientist Robert Koch’s research on bacteria is described, and, thus, Koch is positioned as a famous person to study (p. 162). Finally, language analysis entailed noting the specific words used (see Osborn, 2016) to describe various people presented in the texts as well as their contributions to the field of health/U.S. society.

Table 2. Types of Analyses

Analytic Strategy	Guiding Analytic Questions
Image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How many pictures are included in a given text and how many times are individuals and groups of various backgrounds included in those pictures? • How are groups or individuals visually portrayed vis-à-vis one another?
People to Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who (as in people from which backgrounds) are noted as worthy of study and how are they positioned?
Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What descriptors and associated characteristics are used to describe different groups in the written language of the text?

Content analysis categories and tensions. In our content analysis we employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches, counting textual elements and examining themes (Berg, 2004). We were interested in documenting how race, gender, and sexuality were portrayed or

described. This posed difficulties and paradoxes for our research team as we aimed to categorize “types” of people, while maintaining our belief that human diversity is inherently complex and nuanced. For instance, the individual members of our research team—who all identify as straight, cisgender women of various racial and geographic backgrounds, including bi-racial (Black/White) from the northeastern United States, White from the west, Native American from the west, White from the northeast, and Black from the northeast—subscribed to the belief put forward by the American Anthropological Association (1998) and others that there is more within race group variation than between group variation. Yet, in order to conduct our image analyses, in absence of other markers from the publishers, such as explicitly stating a person’s background, we relied on simple visual and phenotypic cues to categorize images, such as skin tone and hair texture, and dress and hairstyle. Such an approach can be problematic for a number of reasons, including potentially reifying facile, racist, sexist, and heterosexist notions about identity that we as scholars and educators hope to challenge through our work (see Pollock, 2004).

However, while less than ideal, we felt the effort to document portrayals of various groups of people in textbooks was important and barred other possible methodologies; if we make no attempts to document how and how frequently individuals from various backgrounds are portrayed in texts, we will have little basis from which to challenge dominant paradigms. Most importantly, we also imagined that when students pick up textbooks, without other training or direction, they likely make swift assumptions about the people portrayed in the texts based on cursory phenotypic suggestions (for example, the process of making quick, often implicit judgments based on physical cues has been well documented by the researchers affiliated with Project Implicit; <https://www.projectimplicit.net/index.html>). Lastly, to indicate our own

subjectivity in the coding process, we often included words such as “appears” or “looks” in descriptions of people in the images we coded; ours is clearly not the only interpretation, but may provide a useful one, nonetheless (see Francis & Paechter, 2015 for a discussion of the dilemmas of categorization in education research, focusing on gender).

In terms of documenting sexuality, a less necessarily “visible” form of difference, we relied on a combination of visual and textual cues. For instance, we coded dyads as a romantic couple if they were described using coupling language or in associated poses and attire. For example, texts referred to “mothers” and “fathers,” and “boyfriends” and “girlfriends.” Images also included photos of women in wedding gowns and men in tuxedos, and men and women holding hands. We only coded images that explicitly identified couples in these ways.

Content analyzing textbooks. For this study, all text and images in the main part of the text and appendices in a given textbook were coded. Research team members began by tracking the presence of specific demographic categories in Microsoft Excel using a basic binary coding scheme (1 = present; 0 = not present; see Table 3 for a list of coding variables), which was ultimately used to run quantitative analysis in STATA statistical analysis software. Concurrently and subsequently, research team members wrote analytical and theoretical memos, engaging in repeated readings of text and viewing of images, posing questions and hypotheses about the way various groups and individuals were positioned visually and discursively (see Deckman, 2017). After independent analysis, research team members came back together to generate and determine patterns across the data.

Table 3. Coding Variables

Variable Name	Variable Description
Textbook_ID	Textbook identification
Publisher	Textbook publisher

Grade	Grade level
Image	Image Identification Number
Number_People	Number of people in a given image
Person_Id	Identification number for each person appearing in text
Black	Race = Black
White	Race = White
Asian	Race = Asian
Mid_Eastern	Race = Middle Eastern
Native	Race = Native American
Latino	Race = Latino
Ambiguous_Race	Race = Ambiguous (multiple likely interpretations)
Indeterm_Race	Race = indeterminate b/c not enough facial features shown
Male	Gender = male
Trans	Gender = transgender
Gender_Ambiguous	Gender = indeterminate b/c not enough face/body shown, baby, etc.
Group	Image is of a group of people (not just one individual)
Care	Is this person engaged in self-care/grooming (e.g. brushing hair)?
Primping	Is the person engaged in non-essential self-care/grooming and/or self-care/grooming that is a social activity (i.e. with another person)?
Housework	Is this person engaged in housework (like making the bed, etc)?
Het_Coupl	This person is a member of a heterosexual couple.
Hom_Coupl	This person is a member of a homosexual couple.

Determining interrater reliability. As expected practice with content analyses (see Gabriel & Lester, 2013; Polikoff, 2015) and given the fraught nature of coding images based on visual and phenotypic cues, we engaged in norming sessions, wherein members of our research team individually coded and debated the coding of various images, until agreement was reached. Subsequently, members of the research team all coded HAR2. We found a high degree of

agreement on identifying gender as male or female ($\kappa = 0.8762$).³ In our original research protocol we intended to code gender in terms of documenting inclusion of transgender individuals, however given that trans individuals may identify as male or female, we encountered the paradox that trans identity might be rendered invisible unless noted by the text. We found that our degree of agreement was slightly lower, but still acceptable (Landis & Koch, 1977), when coding individuals in images as White, Black, Asian, Latino, and Other/Indeterminate/Ambiguous ($\kappa = 0.7181$). This was in part because of the ambiguity of “Latino” as a racial category, since Latinos may identify as members of various race groups.

Findings

In this section, we discuss two complex and intertwined patterns for how the textbooks approached “diversity.” We begin by focusing on the seemingly positive, or at least benign, apparent inclusion of individuals from marginalized backgrounds in the texts. We then augment and complicate the apparent embracing of diversity by discussing specific patterns in the way representations of sexuality, gender, and racial diversity in the texts may subtly communicate normative and controlling health messages (see Burrows & McCormack, 2014).

Apparently Diverse

Diverse in numbers. Our content analysis revealed that when considering sheer numbers, our textbook sample presented far more diverse images than past textbooks (see Sleeter & Grant, 1991; see Table 4 below). For example, males and females were almost equally represented (46% and 54% of individuals in the texts, respectively), POCs (people of color), taken together, and White people were also almost equally represented (51% and 49%, respectively). Notably absent from the images we explored, however, were unequivocal

³ We use Cohen’s Kappa coefficient as our measure for interrater reliability given that it takes into account agreement and disagreement for a more conservative and robust measure of rater agreement.

representations of same-sex couples and transgender-identified individuals.⁴ LGBT persons make up an estimated 3.5 percent of Americans (Gates & Newport, 2013), yet were absent in any explicit way from the sampled texts.⁵

Table 4.
Gender, Race, and Ability Status in the Textbook Sample

	All Textbooks		Harcourt Health and Fitness						McGraw-Hill Health & Wellness					
	Total	%	Grade 2		Grade 4		Grade 6		Grade 1		Grade 3		Grade 8	
Gender Identification	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Female	1,615	53.69	234	52.70	325	51.75	321	51.86	11	40.74	241	59.65	483	54.51
Male	1,393	46.31	210	47.30	303	48.25	298	48.14	16	59.26	163	40.35	403	45.49
Race/Ethnic Identification	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
White	1,472	49.00	245	55.18	340	54.23	337	54.44	9	33.33	179	44.31	362	41.00
Black	522	17.38	78	17.57	146	23.29	85	13.73	5	18.52	56	13.86	152	17.21
Asian	244	8.12	28	6.31	36	5.74	54	8.72	1	3.70	38	9.41	87	9.85
Latino	248	8.26	17	3.83	35	5.58	25	4.04	5	18.52	47	11.63	119	13.48
Other	518	17.24	76	17.12	71	11.30	118	19.06	7	25.93	84	20.79	164	18.51
Total Images	1,468		213		289		291		10		209		456	
Total Individuals	3,008		444		628		619		27		404		886	

As suggested by multicultural education scholars (e.g. Banks, 1995; McIntosh, 1983), while the numbers might indicate progress in terms of including members of non-dominant groups in textbooks, our qualitative analysis demonstrates ambiguity in the treatment of diversity. Specifically, we demonstrate tokenism in the inclusion of non-dominant groups and even in defining “diversity.” Such tokenism may dampen critical social analysis by focusing on difference in a perfunctory, celebratory way.

Foregrounding racial diversity. Not only did the texts include images of individuals from diverse backgrounds throughout, but across the textbooks we found a pattern in which the first images in the texts—as early as the table of contents—were highly likely to include POCs. For example, five of the first six images shown in MAC3 include POCs. These images display

⁴ Given the current ensuing debates regarding gender and the use of public restrooms in the United States, this absence is notable (see *New York Times*, 2016).

⁵ Here we use “LGBT” in keeping with the cited study’s language. Elsewhere in this paper, we use the term “LGB” when referring to sexuality. Alternatively, we use “transgender” when referring to gender. This is in keeping with recent calls from critical educators to draw attention to the specific context and marginalization of transgender youth and to recognize that while gender and sexuality are related, they are not synonymous (see Meyer, 2016; Payne & Smith, 2014).

people in various contexts ranging from an ethnically ambiguous girl in a group of four children, two of whom appear White and another whose face isn't visible, reading a book together (p. v) to a boy who appears to be Black reading the ingredients on a milk carton (p. vii). The one image that does not include an identifiable POC depicts a White-appearing male using an inhaler—which could suggest diversity in ability. This pattern of including images of people from non-dominant race backgrounds continues until the fifteenth image in the text, which shows what appears to be a White father discussing “family and social health” with his son (p. A5).

We also found evidence of this approach in MAC8, which begins with images of predominantly White groups of people that include one or two non-White individuals or a person with a disability. Looking solely at the first 15 images in all the textbooks (excluding MAC1 because it has no table of contents and only contains 10 images), we find 53 percent of the people depicted appear to be POCs. This is approximately 13 percent higher than the share of the American population that identifies as non-White (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015), and just slightly higher than the 51 percent of the individuals in images across all of the textbooks that appear to be POCs.

Such over-representation of non-dominant groups might constitute a move towards equity and inclusion. However, as we discuss below, when under-represented groups are presented as “tokens”—included in a superficial way, such as being forefronted in a textbook, that does not “acknowledge, and explore [the] implications [of difference]”—the effect can be reinforcement of stereotypes and reification of “the assumption that our society is inherently Eurocentric, male-centric, Christian-centric, heterosexual-centric, and upper-middle-class centric” (Gorski, 1995-2014, ¶2).

It's *all* about diversity. Not only are individuals of diverse backgrounds included in the images in the texts and forefronted in the beginning pages of the texts, but diversity is marked and positioned as something to be celebrated and embraced through sections on nutrition and community involvement, and in instances where the text does not seem to be specifically engaging issues of difference. For instance, in HAR6 there is an entire section about ethnic foods. The “Nutrition Around the World” section begins with a subsection on “Mexican Cooking” and a picture of and recipe for “Chicken Soft Tacos” (p. 90). On the opposing page a black, white, tan, and blue woven serape is strewn with labeled food items: avocados, tomatoes, poblano peppers, jalapeños, tortillas, white cheese, green salsa, pinto beans, black olives, cilantro, tomatillos, and diced tomatoes. The caption reads: “Many Americans enjoy the unique flavor of Mexican food” (p. 91). While the caption presents a seemingly positive message about “Mexican food,” this line calls out “Mexican food” as a special kind of food that is not seen as American, though Mexicans are the largest Latino group in the U.S., comprising “28 percent of the country’s 41.3 million foreign-born” (Zong & Batalova, 2014). The Mexican food section is immediately followed by sections on “Asian” and “Mediterranean” foods.

In some cases, when textbooks marked diversity, even topics that do not seem to be readily about race or culture are paired with text or images that are, another example of tokenism in the texts. The result is a confusing combination of seemingly unrelated content. For example, in HAR6 “Lesson 5: Working Together,” there is a subsection, “Making a Difference in Your Community” that discusses “diversity” (p. 335). The section begins, “Can people your age help others learn not to use stereotypes or be prejudiced?” but goes on to give examples that are not directly related back to stereotypes or prejudice reduction, such as: “Some students your age help organize recycling programs in their schools. Others read books to younger children or exercise

dogs at animal shelters....haul away tons of litter to turn trash-covered lots into parks. They clean up old hiking trails and help build new ones. They help at community dinners for the elderly and listen to their stories of long ago” (p. 334).

This text is flanked by four images of cultural celebrations, including one that looks like carnival in Rio with Black people dressed in colorful costumes; an image of a Japanese-looking woman wearing a blue *yukata* (a cotton *kimono*) teaching children of different races how to do origami; and an image that appears to be of a traditional Mexican *mariachi* band wearing blue, grey, and white striped button-down, cowboy-type shirts, and white cowboy hats/sombreros, with one playing the accordion and the other playing the upright bass. The caption for all of the photos reads, “Attending festivals is a good way to learn about other cultures. People are different and alike in many ways” (p. 334). On the subsequent page the text reads,

Joining in on community projects can help you learn about **diversity**...of the ways people differ from each other. When students help in their communities, they might work with people who speak other languages, eat different foods, wear different clothes, and celebrate different holidays. The more you find out about the differences between people, the more you will notice the likeness! // Although people differ in many ways, we all have the same needs and many of the same wants... (bold in original, HAR6, p. 335)

A focus on culturally identified food and festivals aligns with a “heroes and holidays” approach to multicultural education and diversity (Lee, Menkart, & Okazawa-Rey, 2006). Such an approach is often palatable in education because it is easy to act upon through activities that foster “understanding” across students of different backgrounds, such as cultural celebrations or “diversity days.” Yet, with its uncritical tone of “we are all different, but the same,” it does not explore societal power dynamics (May & Sleeter, 2010) and thus is limited in terms of addressing injustice. Furthermore, such depictions essentialize culture and suggest “some aspects

of culture [are] indispensable attributes that must be shared by all people within a particular group,” dishonoring the complexity of lived experience (Nieto, 1999, p. 48).

Thus, these examples illustrate decontextualization of difference and perfunctory treatment of diversity in health texts that takes the form of “liberal multiculturalism” with its simplistic, visible, treatment of difference that leaves societal power dynamics unexplored (May & Sleeter, 2010). With this approach, publishers are able to highlight human diversity and, in many cases, treat it in a celebratory way, which may have a generally benign effect and not require the teacher to engage “messy” issues of difference and power (Nieto, 1999). But, in so doing, issues of injustice remain unengaged and stereotypes may even be perpetuated as will be explored in the subsequent section of the findings.

Controlling Diversity

While taking a stance of “celebrating diversity” might be considered benign at best, at worst, this frame of diversity and overt inclusion of representations of individuals from various backgrounds may serve to belie normative and controlling messages related to difference. This is where we turn our attention to now in discussing the texts’ depictions (or omissions) of sexuality, gender, and race.

Controlling gender through “equal” representation. We found relatively equal shares of males and females among the textbook illustrations, which is an increase in female representation from Sleeter and Grant’s (1991) study. However, our “people to study” and language analyses suggest that this superficial parity may be undermined by the incorporation of images that portray entrenched gender stereotypes. When aggregating across all textbooks, nearly equal numbers of girls and boys were portrayed conducting grooming-related activities, such as looking in the mirror or brushing hair (14 girls and 16 boys). Yet, upon closer inspection,

it became evident that self-care and grooming were presented in gendered ways. Though both girls and boys were shown brushing their teeth, flossing, and washing their faces, half of the images of girls engaged in self-care showed them “primping.” We use the term primping to differentiate hygiene-related self-care from grooming that is more focused on appearance and/or presented as a social activity. For example, one image shows two girls doing their hair together, looking into a shared mirror (MAC3, p. A13). Boys were only depicted primping in two single images. The message here may be that girls ought to be concerned about their appearance and with the joint primping may suggest a policing of girls’ appearance. As Fitzpatrick and Tinning (2014) have noted, messages about body aesthetics and health are deeply intertwined: “Alongside the desire and worship of the mythical fit, healthy, aesthetic body, is the relegation of the non-aesthetic, the ugly body to the margins” (p. 138).

While there were images of girls playing sports, and pictures of boys making food, images like a mother holding an infant surrounded by an adult male (presumably her husband and the baby’s father) and a boy (presumably her other child) (MAC2, p. A62) were common and supported notions of traditional gender roles—and sexuality in some cases. Within MAC2, two young girls are depicted whispering and giggling (p. A65); a young boy fly fishes with an older adult male (p. B6); a boy rollerblades (p. B30); a mother and daughter clip coupons (p. B50); two girls wash dishes together (p. B60); and so on. Yet, nowhere is the stereotypical portrayal of gender roles more evident than in our “people to study” analysis, which revealed that out of six total instances where individuals were featured as historically or socially significant, for instance in sidebars offering a depiction of the person’s contribution to the topic at hand, men were presented four times as people to study. In the MAC8 section on learning disabilities the following caption and related image appear: “Inventor Thomas Edison had dyslexia” (p. B57). In

HAR2, as discussed in the methods section, German scientist Robert Koch's research is described (p. 162). Even when not discussing specific historical figures, males are more likely to be presented as people to study. In one instance, Amit Bushan (a boy who appears to be South Asian) is presented as a role model (MAC3). Amit has asthma and started a campaign against secondhand smoke in Lubbock, Texas (p. D47).

The two women presented as people to study are both former Miss America pageant winners (MAC8). Erika Harold was noted in the text as being an advocate of abstinence (p. A93). Heather Whitestone is described under the heading "Understand Hearing Loss" as having kept "a positive attitude throughout her life and work[ing] to succeed despite her lack of hearing" (p. C16). It is important to note that many people in the Deaf community believe that deafness is not a disability, and therefore not something to be overcome (see Solomon, 1994). Furthermore, both Whitestone and Harold are positioned (Davis & Harré, 1990) with regard to their relationship with men, in terms of Harold advocating abstinence, and Whitestone being described as "now married." The men who are "people to study" are not similarly positioned in terms of their relationship status.

Moreover, the four males comprising people to study were noted for scientific discovery and impacting broad changes within their community. On the other hand, the women were beauty pageant winners, suggesting the importance of female physical appearance and youth, reinforcing the message from elsewhere in the textbooks, as discussed above regarding the priming images, related to the control of women's bodies through messages about right aesthetics. In other words, a subtle suggestion may be that to be important, women must be beautiful in a conventional, normative sense. Furthermore, these women were not lauded for their intellect or ability to affect change in the world. Rather, they were commended for

endorsing a particular worldview and for personally succeeding “despite” a disability. Thus, while males and females appear with similar frequency, males are likelier to be positioned as special, accomplished, and worthy of study and women as valuable for their attractiveness and defined by their relationships with men.

Controlling race through risk discourse. In some instances, characters, people, and customs described in the books are given ethnically identified names or otherwise affiliated with a cultural or ethnic group. In some of these instances, unclear connections are made to issues of diversity that do not always make sense. This happens more frequently in the HAR book series, in which most people who appear in the texts are also named. While names were rarely supplied in the MAC series, we did see evidence of marking difference in a section in MAC3 titled “Making Responsible Decisions” (p. A32). In one example of marking difference, an image of two brown-skinned girls includes the text, “Problem: María’s friend wants her to take a shortcut through an unsafe place. What should she do?” In this example María is clearly marked as Latina through using the accent in her name. In contrast, the other character names used in this specific MAC3 text include Thomas, Charlie, Alice, Sam, Justin, Desmond, Janice, Tina, Eva, Miranda, and Jacob.

Furthermore, this example illustrates another pattern in which racial minorities, particularly Latinos/as in the MAC series were associated with dangerous situations and the need to make “right” choices, as the text in this example goes on to read: “Solution: María has the responsibility of staying safe. She decides to use the four steps on the next page to make a responsible decision.” It is especially notable that this is a rare instance of a name being used in any of the MAC texts and that it is ethnically marked.

Across the textbooks in sections that dealt with conflict, violence, danger, and drug and alcohol abuse we found an overrepresentation of Latinos/as compared to other racial groups. We found 116 images that showed groups or individuals engaged in high-risk behaviors or conflict, or explicitly avoiding such contexts. Latino/a-only groups/individuals accounted for 23% of high-risk images, but just 8% of the individuals depicted in the full textbook sample. White-only groups/individuals accounted for just slightly more of the high-risk images at 28%, though nearly half of all individuals in the textbooks appeared to be White. Asian-only groups/individuals and Black-only groups/individuals accounted for comparatively few of the high-risk images (9% and 5%, respectively), especially when compared to the share of Asians and Blacks identified across all the texts (8% and 17% respectively). Though images of individuals and groups engaged in high-risk practices most frequently depicted multiracial groups (35%), there is a striking disparity between the number of Latinos/as featured in the texts, and the number of Latinos/as featured in scenarios regarding strategies to avoid gangs, weapons, and violence, and manage abusive family relationships.

A connection here can be drawn to Leahy's (2014) analysis of health education practices as promoting a highly political, neoliberal agenda that focuses on individual risk and responsibility. In this way, Latinos/as are tacitly positioned as a group predisposed to "wrong" actions, as a problem group. Therefore, while there are many more brown faces in these health texts than documented in texts from the past, the potentially negative and controlling message communicated may negate the benefits of the inclusion.

Controlling sexuality through omission. While the previous two sections discussed what was present in our data, this section considers what was left out and how omission contributes to a curriculum of control in our sample of health textbooks. In our analysis we found

no images explicitly featuring same-sex couples or lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) individuals. When romantic pairs were shown, all couples, whether teen or adult, were partnered heterosexually. Moreover, zero allusions to homosexuality were apparent in symbolic imagery, such as rainbow flags, triangles, or other historically relevant markers, while numerous explicit references were made to heterosexuality. For instance, in MAC8, a young teen girl lays in a field of flowers daydreaming of her wedding, picturing a man and woman getting married in a thought-bubble. The page reads: “Do you ever wonder what it is like to be married? Do you think about the qualities you would like your husband or wife to have? Do you wonder whether you will have children? Thinking about these questions during your teen years can help you prepare for the future” (p. A96). To borrow the words of Fitzpatrick and Tinning (2014), such a one-sided presentation of possible sexuality presents an “imposition of truth” (p. 132) about right, or “healthy,” as the case may be with health textbooks, ways of being. The “health message” (Fitzpatrick & Tinning) may be that anything other than the coupling of a man and woman is aberrant given that such images and allusions were common across all textbooks.

Similarly, the HAR4 section on “Types of Families,” while discussing various types of families—blended, nuclear, extended, single-parent, and two-parent families—only explicitly describes heteronormative families: “Some families have a mother, a father, and one or more children. This type of family is called a **nuclear family**” (p. 282; bold in original). Though, in the MAC1 text, we noted an *omission of any parenting dyads*—relying on textual cues, for example, that discussed family roles. We similarly noted a preponderance of single-adult-caregivers—as in adults pictured with children in home settings or at medical appointments—as opposed to parenting dyads, across all of the texts except MAC8, which featured equal representation of single adult caregivers and parenting dyads. We found 213 images of adult

caregivers with children. Of those, 146 (69%) were single adult caregivers, and 67 (31%) were parenting dyads. In one section of MAC1 about “Helping Others Be Healthy,” a woman appears to be giving advice to two school-aged boys on what they might eat for breakfast (pp. 10-11). The image appears to be of a mother and her sons, as all three seem to live in the same household and have similar physical features. A few pages later, in another section, “Practice Healthful Habits,” a man appears to be teaching a young girl how to brush her teeth (pp. 12-13). The adult appears to be a father and the child, his daughter, as they also share similar physical features, including freckles.

One view of such images could suggest inclusivity—given that only one adult is shown, the reader could imagine these are single-parent households, foster homes, or even homes with same-sex parents, with the other parent not shown. Yet, without specific consideration of alternatives to heteronormativity, the textbooks more likely lead students to conclude that LGB individuals and families are nonexistent, irrelevant, or perhaps even aberrant. For instance, Bryan (2012) describes how omission of conversations about sexuality works to normalize heterosexuality: “Conversations about gay parents are seen as sexualized, because to identify anything other than the heteronormative standard draws unwanted attention to the heretofore ‘invisible’ (hetero)sexuality of straight parents” (p. 52). Thus, according to Bryan, educators avoid talking about families headed by same-sex parents, but have no problem discussing “a mommy and a daddy,” because the latter is seen as “normal” (or neutral), while the former is not. However, in the case of the textbooks we analyzed, the absence of any parenting dyads does not actually represent neutrality, because of the presentation of consistent heteronormative messages in the books. Furthermore, the textbooks uphold prevailing narratives about sexuality and childrearing. As research on race shows, such seemingly neutral approaches, or the absence of

explicitly addressing difference, perpetuate dominant paradigms for viewing the world (Bronson & Merryman, 2009; Copenhaver-Johnson, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1998), and in the case of sexuality in health textbooks, the consistent use of images featuring heterosexual couples, and absence of representation of other relationships, may silence risks for LGB youth in sexual relationships, including unplanned pregnancy (Saewyc, Poon, Homma, & Skay, 2008).

Overall, this pattern we have identified—lack of inclusion of same-sex couples—as a pattern of omission may serve to reinforce the supremacy of dominant paradigms by offering no explicit alternatives. Then, omission of non-normative sexualities juxtaposed with the celebratory inclusion of ethnic foods and cultural festivals suggests that some forms of diversity are sanctioned, while other are not.

Conclusion and Implications

Though our analysis does not permit us to fully discuss publishers' intent or the impact on young people, there is ample evidence that publishers may be making choices about their products with economic returns in mind and may seek to produce texts that do not alienate dominant populations, whose members are often those who determine which text series are used in classrooms (see Loewen, 2007; Zimmerman, 2011). At the same time, as the liberal form of multiculturalism—which focuses on “celebrating diversity”—becomes increasingly popular (May & Sleeter, 2011), publishers likely also seek to appease buyers who look for notable examples of “diversity” in texts. Given these competing commitments, one result may be to adopt an apolitical, “neutral” tone—though in doing so the texts ultimately reify dominant norms.

While publishers are undoubtedly concerned with the profitability of their products, as educators, our primary concern is the potential impact of exposure to the content and images in

health textbooks on young people. As students from disenfranchised backgrounds experience more negative health outcomes relative to peers from privileged backgrounds (see WHO, 2008), the question of the potential impact of representation—of race, gender, and sexuality—in instructional materials becomes increasingly urgent. If health texts misrepresent or omit depictions of people from various backgrounds, addressing these disparities may be that much more challenging. Although research that links representation and health choice is limited, Schooler, Ward, Merriwether, & Caruthers (2005), suggest a connection between how girls learn about menstruation and whether or not they internalize negative views about menstruating, with decisions they make about sexual risk. These researchers find that women with shameful views of menstruation are likelier to engage in riskier sexual activity, which subsequently can result in disparate health outcomes compared with women who have a positive view of menstruation and are more assertive in their sexual decision-making.

Our findings indicate that educators need to be prepared to address possible biases introduced through educational texts used in classrooms, given the discouraging representations of females and POCs, an endeavor that teacher educators in foundations courses can support. Teachers must take initiative and offer supplemental materials, such as pamphlets, story books, movies, and multimedia resources that develop students' knowledge and understanding of diversity from a critical perspective, addressing issues of power related to difference (see Lee, Menkart, & Okazawa-Rey, 2006). We further encourage educators and teacher educators to engage their students in assessing their chosen or assigned textbooks for racial, gender, sexual, and ability diversity (see Foster, 2012). Teachers may also further discuss with young people the messages they are deriving from health textbooks, as Burrows and McCormack (2014) have suggested, "a critically informed variety of public health could provide opportunities for children

to come to know health as more than simply eating the right foods and running a lot” (p. 159).

Then teachers can prepare supplemental materials to fill in gaps and challenge hegemonic paradigms. For instance, in MAC8 in the section, “Other Protective Factors,” on avoiding risk of violence, an image of a Black-appearing boy and an Asian-appearing boy in matching baseball uniforms is accompanied by text on sharing cultural traditions, avoiding discrimination, making responsible decisions, and using resistance skills (pp. C76-C77). A teacher using this text could have students more deeply explore the connection between discrimination and violence that the textbook addresses in one paragraph:

If you treat people unfairly because they are different, you can hurt their feelings. Some people may react violently to this unfair treatment. Treating people with respect shows good character and protects you from violence. Don’t tease other people or put them down. It can provoke anger. Try to understand how other people feel. Put yourself in their situation. How would you like to be treated?

This paragraph shows why some people put others down who are different from them. But, as is common in neoliberal discourse related to health (Leahy, 2014), it falls short in terms of making connections to larger societal structures, focusing on individuals and individual interactions.

In an ideal world, districts selecting textbooks would be held responsible for adopting materials that represent our diverse society by portraying individuals of marginalized populations in a way that does not perpetuate existing stereotypes. Until that time, educators must take up that task.

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